

The Legacy of C. S. Lewis

Part I

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Apologetics as Defense

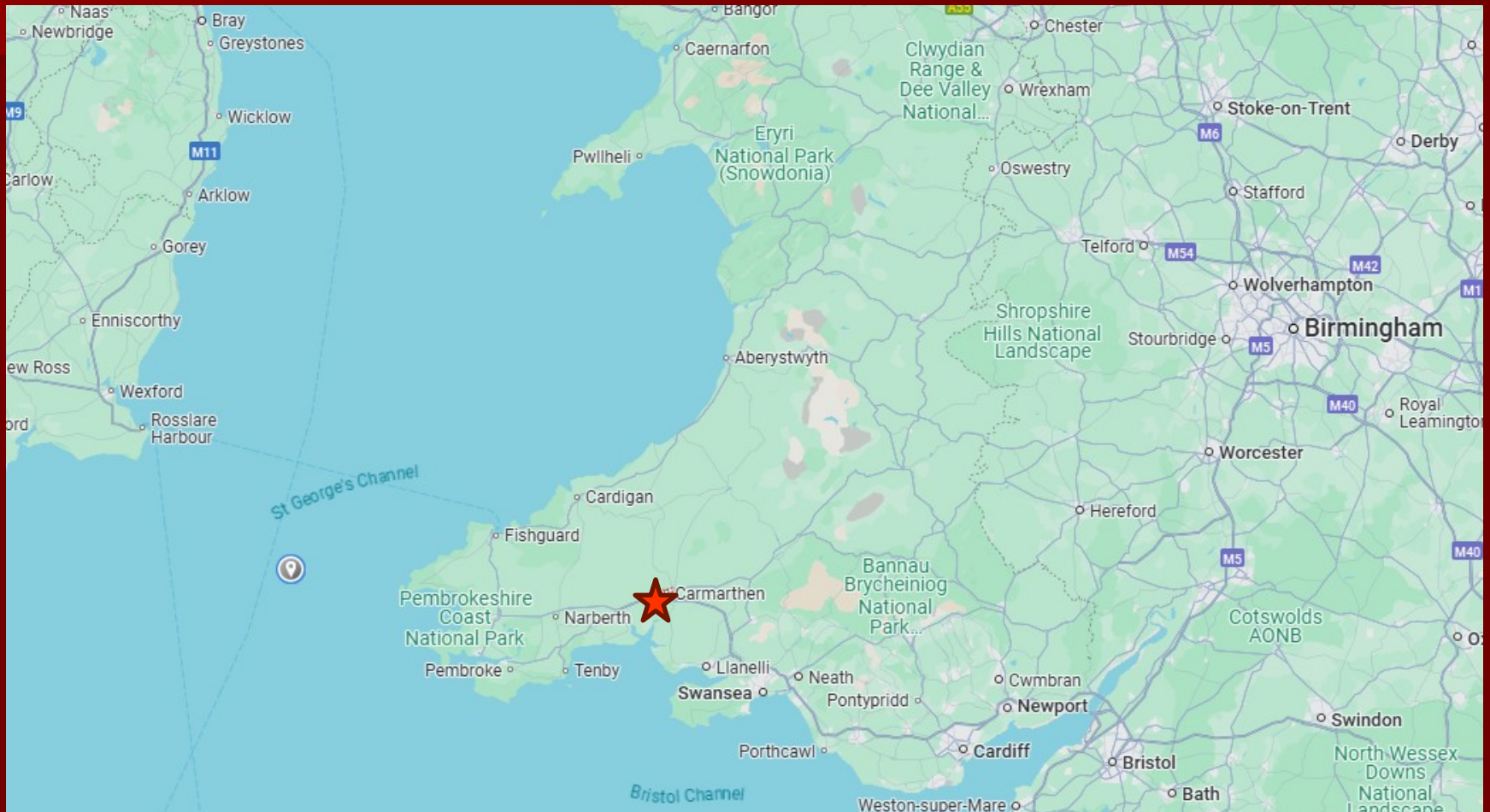
- “The Weight of Glory”
- *The Abolition of Man*
- *Mere Christianity* (his major apologetic work)
- *The Problem of Pain*
- *Miracles*
- Some other essays...



Especially

- “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,” delivered at Westcott House, Cambridge, on May 11, 1959.
- “A Christmas Sermon for Pagans,” published in *The Strand* in December 1946 (for Part II).
- “Christian Apologetics,” delivered on April 1, 1945 to the Carmarthen Conference for Youth Leaders and Junior Clergy in Carmarthen, Wales.

Carmarthen, Wales



“Christian Apologetics”

- From the collection *God in the Dock*.
- In the first half of the essay he is speaking more about Christian witness and evangelism than what I think of as apologetics.
- For example, he invites us to check our assumptions about what people think words such as “charity,” “Christian,” “atonement,” and “morality” mean.
- He states, “What we want is not more little books about Christianity, but more little books by Christians on other subjects—with their Christianity latent.”

“Christian Apologetics”

- He also writes, “A sense of sin is almost totally lacking.” That is an idea worth remembering and including in our apologetics.
- “... in my experience, if one begins from the sin that has been one’s own chief problem during the last week, one is very often surprised at the way this shaft goes home. But whatever method we use, our continual effort must be to get their mind away from public affairs and ‘crime’ and bring them down to brass tacks—to the whole network of spite, greed, envy, unfairness and conceit in the lives of ‘ordinary decent people’ like themselves (and ourselves).”

“Christian Apologetics”

- The second half of the essay: “I turn now to the question of the actual attack.” That is, his apologetics. And here follow his points.
- “Do not attempt to water Christianity down.... You must frankly argue for supernaturalism from the very outset.”

“Christian Apologetics”

- “The two popular ‘difficulties’ you will probably have to deal with are these. (1) ‘Now that we know how huge the universe is and how insignificant the Earth, it is ridiculous to believe that the universal God should be specially interested in our concerns.’”
- “(2) ‘People believed in miracles in the Old Days because they didn’t then know that they were contrary to the Laws of Nature.’ But they did.... The very idea of ‘miracle’ presupposes knowledge of the Laws of Nature; you can’t have the idea of an exception until you have the idea of a rule.”

“Christian Apologetics”

- “I have found that people are usually disposed to hear the divinity of Our Lord discussed *before* going into the existence of God.”
- “... some form of the *aut Deus aut malus homo* can be used. The majority of them start with the idea of the ‘great human teacher’ who was deified by His superstitious followers....

“Christian Apologetics”

- ... It must be pointed out how very improbable this is among Jews and how different to anything that happened with Plato, Confucius, Buddha, Mohammed.’ The Lord’s own words and claims (of which many are quite ignorant) must be forced home.”
- That is, “The Shocking Alternative” from *Mere Christianity*, with the Lord, liar, lunatic trilemma.

“Christian Apologetics”

- “Something will usually have to be said about the historicity of the Gospels.”
- “My own line was to say that I was a professional literary critic and I thought I did know the difference between legend and historical writing: that the Gospels were certainly not legends ...: and that if they are not history then they are realistic prose fiction of a kind which actually never existed before the eighteenth century.”
- That is, “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism.”

“Christian Apologetics”

- “One of the great difficulties is to keep before the audience’s mind the question of Truth. They always think you are recommending Christianity not because it is *true* but because it is *good*. And in the discussion they will at every moment try to escape from the issue ‘True—or False’ into stuff about a good society, or morals, or the incomes of Bishops, or ...

“Christian Apologetics”

- ... the Spanish Inquisition, or France, or Poland—or anything whatever. You have to keep forcing them back, and again back, to the real point.”
- “... Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of *no* importance, and, if true, of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

“Christian Apologetics”

- “... we are not pronouncing all other religions to be totally false, but ... we must attack wherever we meet the nonsensical idea that mutually exclusive propositions about God can both be true.”
- “No doctrine of that Faith seems to me so spectral, so unreal as one that I have just successfully defended in a public debate.”





Addison's Walk



Mere Christianity as Apologetics

“Ever since I became a Christian, I have thought that the best, perhaps the only, service I could do for my unbelieving neighbors was to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times.”

Characteristics

- Apologetics (i.e., defense)
- A reflection of Lewis's personality (rational, ordered, and imaginative)
- Autobiographical, i.e., a reflection of Lewis's life
- A well-known voice in England during World War Two (first delivered over the BBC)
- Battlefield language (more later)
- Radio

Not Covered

- Baptism and the Lord's Supper (the Sacraments)
- The Virgin Mary (see Lewis's Preface)
- The Pope
- Military service vs. pacifism
- The Bible as understood by certain traditions

Not Covered

- Eschatology
- Divorce
- Creation
- Those who never heard of Christ—lost or capable of salvation
- Birth control
- The existence of the devil

Not Covered

- Baptism in the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts
- The Seven Ecumenical Councils
- Spiritual authority of the local congregation or higher ecclesiastical jurisdictions
- Worship and music

That is, ...

- We can easily get bogged down in irrelevant details rather than focusing on the real issues, such as the deity of Christ or the specific matter that bothers the agnostic.

Words from the Battlefield

- More than one per page (251)
- Battle, invasion/invoke, force (20x), Allies, march, Gestapo, army, blow to bits, soldier (16x), war (80x), ration (21x), battle/battlefield, enemy (22x), fight (16x), struggle, German/Germany, Nazi, infantry, sabotage, rebel/rebellion (9x), surrender (8x), arms (7x), conquest, conquer, Jews, smuggle, regiment (4x), and military
- Written during World War Two by a veteran of World War One (spiritual warfare)

Paul's Strategy

Just as Lewis wrote *Mere Christianity* in the context of World War II and Paul spoke to the Athenians about an unknown God and wrote differently to a largely Gentile church (Philippians) without using Old Testament Scriptures and to a largely Jewish church in Rome using frequent Old Testament quotations, so we need to use the language of our audience.

Analogies (Book I, Chapter 5)

1. Putting the clock back (28)
2. Taking a wrong turn (28)
3. Doing arithmetic (29)
4. Somebody as a great artist (29)
5. Building a house (29)
6. The multiplication table (30)
7. Being sick and needing a doctor (31f.)
8. War (32)
9. International politics (32)



When asked by James Welch

I think what I mainly want to talk about is the Law of Nature, or objective right and wrong. It seems to me that the N.T., by preaching repentance and forgiveness, always *assumes* an audience who already believe in the law of Nature and know that they have disobeyed it. In modern England we cannot at present assume this, and therefore most apologetic begins a stage too far on. The first step is to create, or recover, the sense of guilt. (Lewis letter to Welch, Feb. 10, 1941)

Book I

- Five talks
- August 6 through September 6, 1941
- “Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe” (pre-evangelism)
- Focus: Chapter 1

His Opening

Everyone has heard people quarrelling. Sometimes it sounds funny and sometimes it sounds merely unpleasant; but however it sounds, I believe we can learn something very important from listening to the kinds of things they say.



Book I, Chapter 1

They say things like this: “How’d you like it if anyone did the same to you?”—“That’s my seat, I was there first”—“Leave him alone, he isn’t doing you any harm”—“Why should you shove in first?”—“Give me a bit of your orange, I gave you a bit of mine”—“Come on, you promised.” People say things like that every day, educated people as well as uneducated, and children as well as grown-ups.

His Opening

Now what interests me about all these remarks is that the man who makes them is not merely saying that the other man's behavior does not happen to please him. He is appealing to some kind of standard of behavior which he expects the other man to know about. And the other man very seldom replies: "To hell with your standard."

Book I, Chapter 1

Nearly always he tries to make out that what he has been doing does not really go against the standard, or that if it does there is some special excuse. He pretends there is some special reason in this particular case why the person who took the seat first should not keep it, or that things were quite different when he was given the bit of orange, ...

His Opening

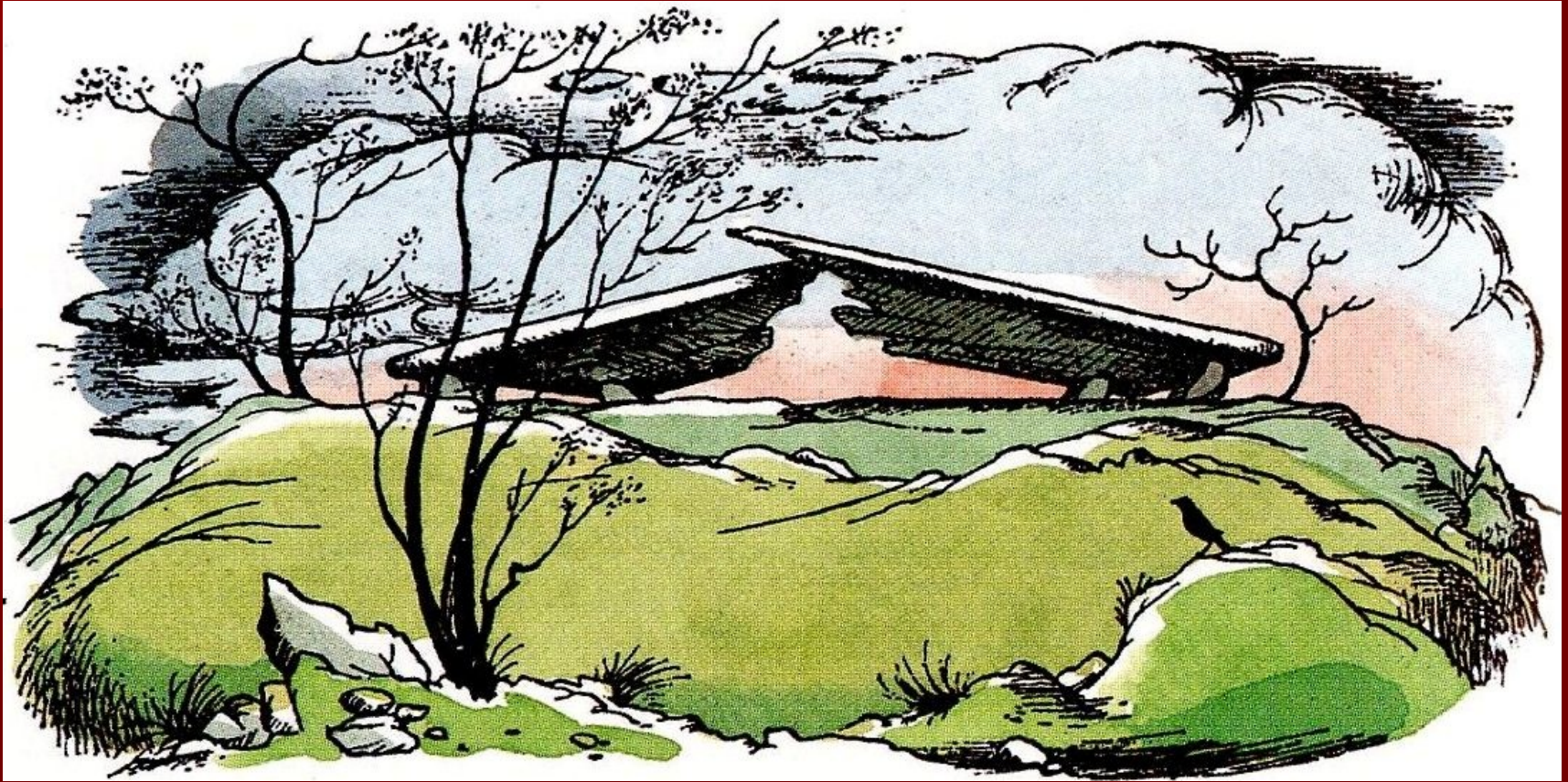
... or that something has turned up which lets him off keeping his promise. It looks, in fact, very much as if both parties had in mind some kind of Law or Rule of fair play or decent behavior or morality or whatever you like to call it, about which they really agreed.



His Opening

And they have. If they had not, they might, of course, fight like animals, but they could not *quarrel* in the human sense of the word.

Quarrelling means trying to show that the other man is in the wrong. And there would be no sense in trying to do that unless you and he had some sort of agreement as to what Right and Wrong are; just as there would be no sense in saying that a footballer had committed a foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football.



The Moral Law

Everyone recognizes moral imperatives, and we all realize we're not following them too well. Lewis calls this the *Tao*, a broad moral consensus found all over the world, past and present.

The Moral Law

In *The Silver Chair*, Jill and Eustace are given four Signs to guide them on their quest, very much like God giving the Law in the Pentateuch. Even though they miff three of the four Signs, they are still able to accomplish their mission, as we are saved by grace, not by keeping the law in every jot and tittle



The Moral Law elsewhere in Lewis

- Lewis, “The greatest barrier I have met is the almost total absence from the minds of my audience of any sense of sin.” (“God in the Dock,” 243)
- Hence, *The Screwtape Letters*, which teach us the subtlety and deceptiveness of temptation to sin.
- In the opening chapter of *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, when John is learning about religion, we read, “Knowledge of broken law precedes all other religious experiences....” Lewis (*The Pilgrim’s Regress*, 28).

Law and Gospel

While Lewis had little contact with Lutherans and did not use the terms “Law and Gospel,” he understood the basic theology of sin and grace, good news and bad news, judgment and hope, law and gospel.

Book II

- Five talks
- January 11 through February 15, 1942
- “What Christians Believe”
- Focus: Chapter 3

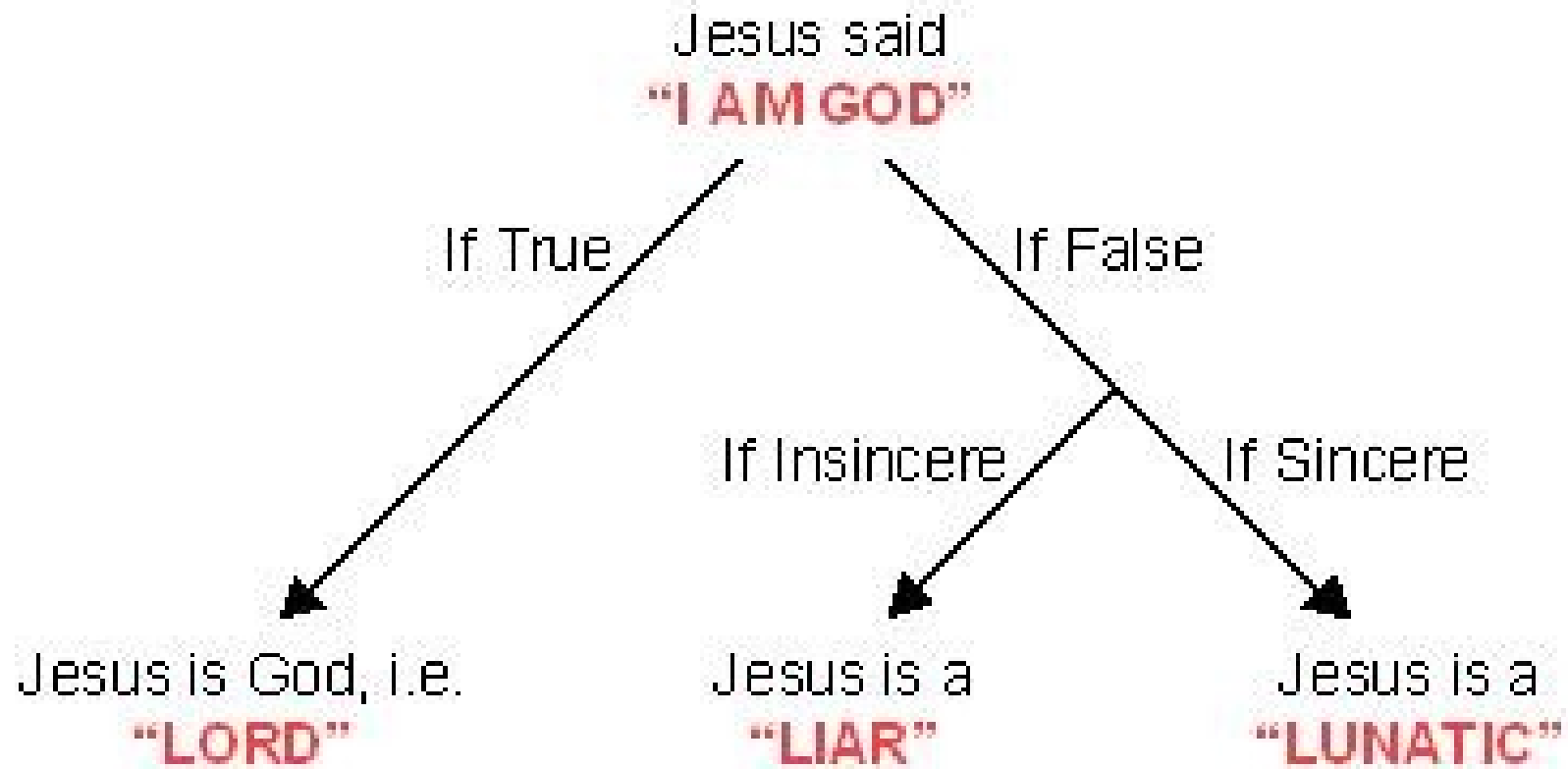
Four Clergymen Read Book II

- One Church of England theologian
- One Roman Catholic
- One Presbyterian
- One Methodist
- No Lutherans!

Four Clergymen

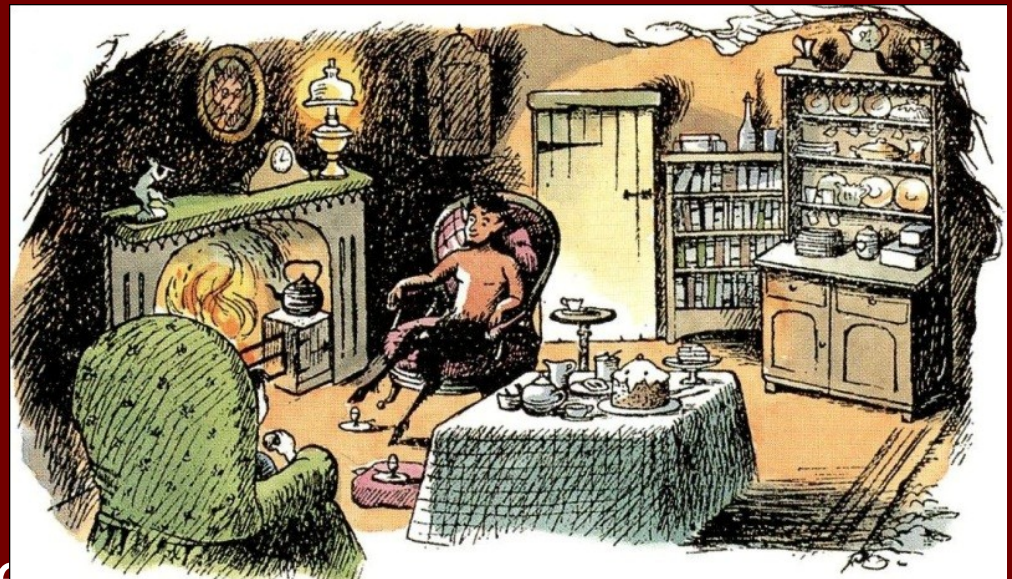
- Probably Austin Farrer, Chaplain, Trinity College, Oxford
- Dom Bede Griffiths, Roman Catholic friend and adult convert to Christianity
- Definitely Rev. Joseph Dowell, RAF Padre, Methodist
- Rev. Eric Fenn, Presbyterian, BBC

Book II: "The Shocking Alternative"



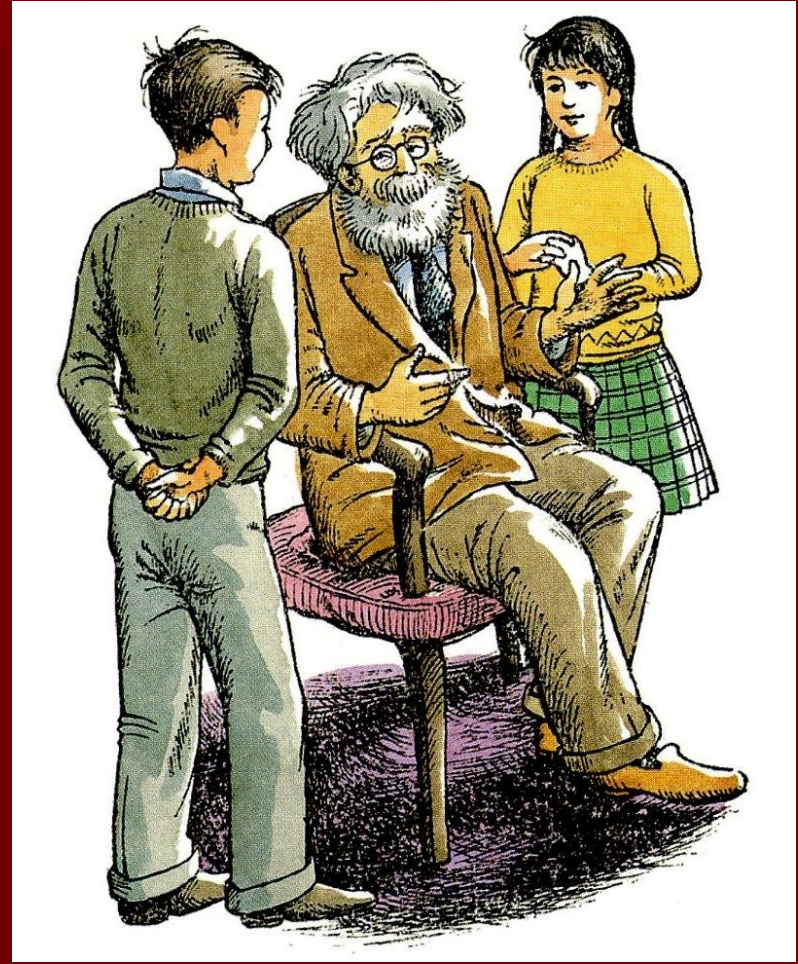
Lucy in *The Lion, the Witch...*

- The context
- The three options for Lucy.
- “Logic!” said the Professor half to himself. “Why don’t they teach logic at these schools? There are only three possibilities.” ...



Professor Kirke

"Either your sister is telling lies, or she is mad, or she is telling the truth. You know she doesn't tell lies and it is obvious that she is not mad. For the moment then and unless any further evidence turns up, we must assume that she is telling the truth."



YouTube on C. S. Lewis Doodles

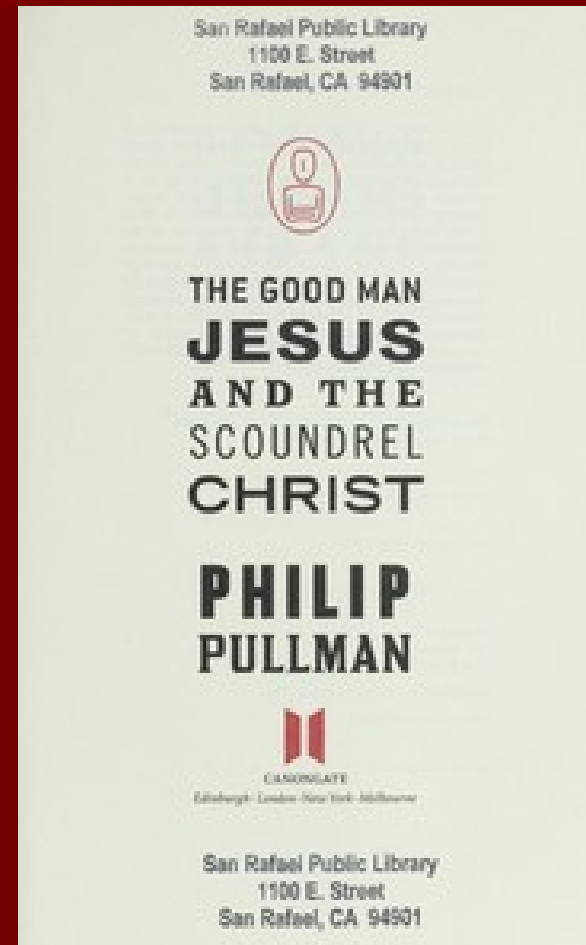
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?
v=bxzuh5Xx5G4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxzuh5Xx5G4)

Nicol Cross

- The Principal of Manchester College at Oxford University, Nicol Cross, a Unitarian, didn't like the logic of Lewis in one of his talks over the BBC.
- Cross called himself a Unitarian—a creed sometimes defined as “one God, no devil, and twenty shillings in the pound.”

Nicol Cross

Principal Nicol Cross
wanted to believe that
Jesus was a good man,
but nothing more.



Nicol Cross

- He said at a meeting of the Socratic Club on November 11, 1946, that “he must allude to the ‘vulgar nonsense’ that ‘a man who said the things that Jesus said, and was not God would be either a lunatic or a devil.’”
- He said that this represented such a simplification of the possibilities as only a naïve person could perpetrate, who combined a triple ignorance of New Testament criticism, of psychology, and of elementary logic.

Lewis on the BBC

Nicol Cross was referencing Lewis's BBC address, entitled "The Shocking Alternative," first delivered on Feb. 1, 1942, an address that later became Chapter Three of Book Two in *Mere Christianity*. Elton Trueblood, professor of philosophy and chaplain at both Stanford University and Earlham College, had a much different and more accurate perspective on this most powerful chapter:

Elton Trueblood

- “In reading Lewis I could not escape the conclusion that the popular view of Christ as being a Teacher, and only a Teacher, has within it a self-contradiction that cannot be resolved. I saw, in short, that conventional liberalism cannot survive rigorous and rational analysis.” (Elton Trueblood, *While It Is Day: An Autobiography*, 99)
- Read “only a Teacher” as “a good man, but nothing else.”

Elton Trueblood

“C. S. Lewis reached me primarily because he turned the intellectual tables. I was wholly accustomed to a world in which the sophisticates engaged in attack, while the Christians sought bravely to be on the defense, but Lewis turned this around and forced the unbeliever into a posture of defense....

Elton Trueblood



.... In the *Screwtape Letters* dated July 5, 1941, at Magdalen College, Oxford, Lewis, who up to that time had been an inconspicuous academician, inaugurated a new Christian strategy."

Book III

- Eight Talks
- Practical advice: “Christian Behaviour”
- September 20 through November 8, 1942
- Focus: Chapters 1 and 10

“The Three Parts of Morality”

- Harry Emerson Fosdick: “Tell me what kind of a God you don’t believe in. Perhaps I don’t believe in that kind of God either.”
 1. Fair play and harmony between individuals.
 2. Harmonizing the things inside each individual
 3. The general purpose of human life as a whole.

In that third and last part of morality, we find an opening for witness.

The Argument from Desire

- “If I find in myself a desire ...”

Mere Christianity, "Hope"

■ The Christian says, "Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud....

Mere Christianity, "Hope"

... Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same."

Book IV

- Seven Talks
- “Beyond Personality: The Christian View of God”
- February 22 through March 30, 1944
- Focus: Chapter 8

“Is Christianity Hard or Easy?”

- Christ says both “Take up your Cross” and “My yoke is easy and my burden light”?
- Is this a contradiction?
- Likewise, witnessing is both hard and easy.
- A pastor’s sermon to a married couple ...
- “You have come here to die.”



Publication Schedule

- *Broadcast Talks*, the first and second series of broadcasts, 1942 (US: *The Case for Christianity*)
- *Christian Behavior*, the third series, 1943
- *Beyond Personality*, the fourth series, 1944
- *Mere Christianity*, 1952

Reviews

"We have never read arguments better marshaled and handled so that they can be remembered, or any book more useful to the Christian...who finds himself called upon to argue briefly from first premises, to say why morality is not herd-instinct, why there is a special and unique character attached to the sense of obligation, why the conviction that there is a law of right and wrong and a transcendent morality is only intelligible if there is a God." (*The Tablet*, July 18, 1942)

Reviews

“No writer of popular apologetics today is more effective than Mr. C. S. Lewis.” (*The Times Literary Supplement*, Sept. 19, 1942)

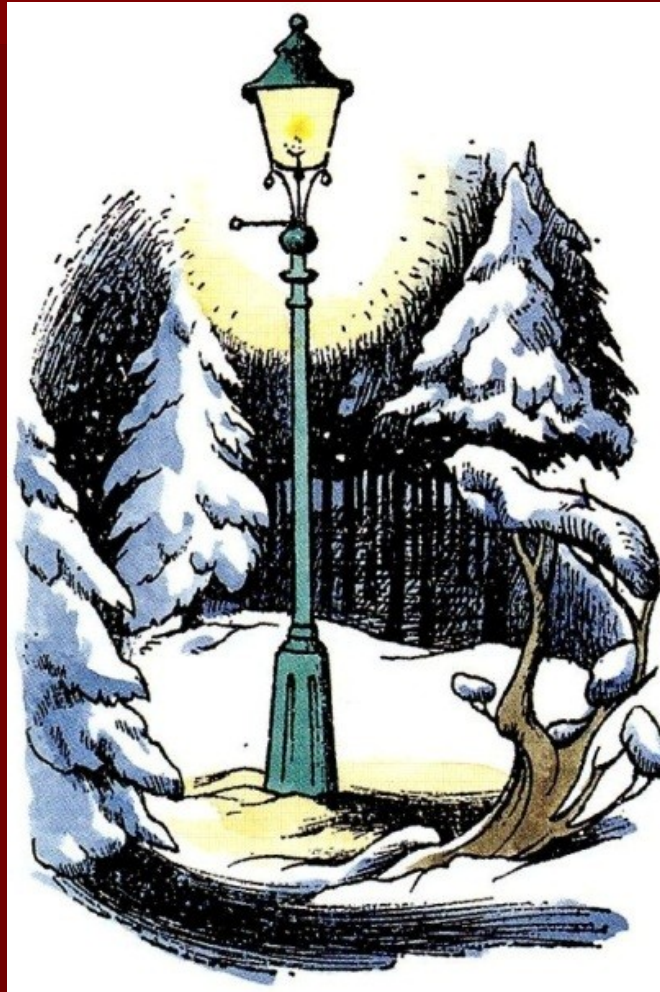
Concluding Lessons

- Speak the language of the person to whom you are speaking.
- Avoid controversial issues: the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing (avoiding eschatology, denominational differences, etc.).
- Wherever you can, use a clear and basic word instead of a complicated word.
- Use stories (e.g., Narnia, Ransom Trilogy, “Shadowlands”) and analogies wherever you can. The Gospel is story, as is your life.

Concluding Lessons

- Sometimes go places and do things for the sake of the Gospel.
- Perhaps even give a copy of *Mere Christianity* to an interested person.
- You might even get yourself a copy to assist you in being prepared to give an answer.
- Teach a Bible Class on *Mere Christianity* (using discussion questions?!?).

Imagination and Apologetics



The Pilgrim's Regress

- "... if you will, it [words of wisdom] is mythology. It is but truth, not fact: an image, not the very real." (*The Pilgrim's Regress*, Chapter V, "Across the Canyon," 169)



They Stand Together

- Lewis on five-year-old Michael on Dec. 7, 1935:
- “Minto reads him the Peter Rabbit books every evening, and it is a lovely sight. She reads very slowly and he gazes up into her eyes which look enormous through her spectacles—what a pity she has no grandchildren. Would you believe it, that child had never been read to nor told a story by his mother in his life? Not that he is neglected. He has a whole time Nurse ..., a hundred patent foods, is spoiled, and far too expensively dressed: but his poor imagination has been left without any natural food at all.”

Lewis on Shelley's play, *Prometheus Unbound*:

- “Like all great myths its primary appeal is to the imagination: its indirect and further appeal to the will and the understanding can therefore be diversely interpreted according as the reader is a Christian, a politician, a psychoanalyst, or what not. Myth is thus like manna; it is to each man a different dish and to each the dish he needs.”

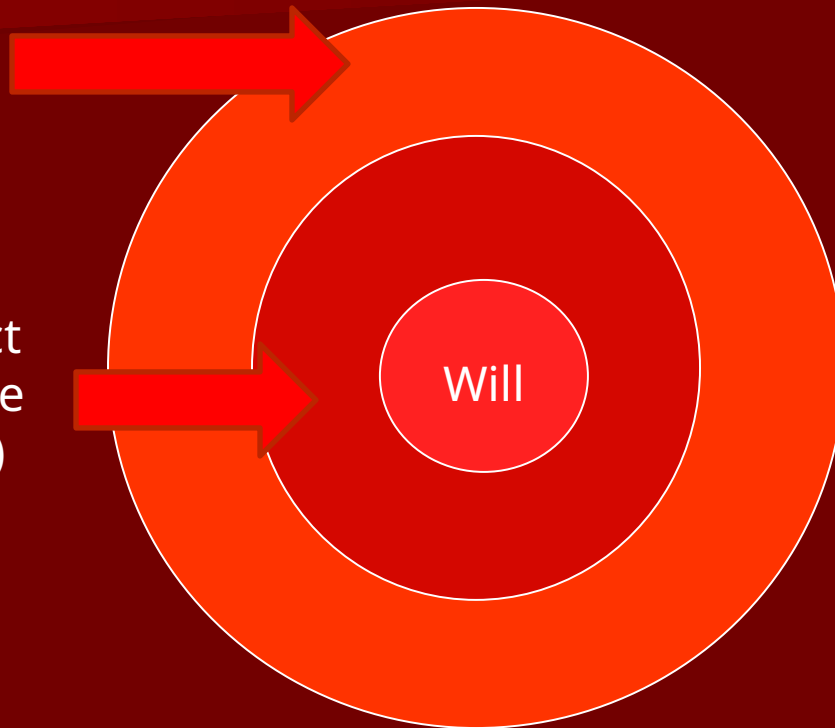
“Shelley, Dryden, and Mr. Eliot”

- “It does not grow old nor stick at frontiers racial, sexual, or philosophic; and even from the same man at the same moment it can elicit different responses at different levels. But great myth is rare in a reflective age; the temptation to allegorize, to thrust into the story the conscious doctrines of the poet, there to fight it out as best they can with the inherent tendency of the fable, is usually too strong.”

Lewis' Idea of the Person

Imagination
(outer circle)

Intellect
(middle circle)



Imagination

- “The battle is between faith and reason on one side and emotion and imagination on the other.” (*Mere Christianity*, 139)
- Not in the sense of daydream or reverie or wish-fulfilling fantasy.
- Not even in the mere sense of invention.
- But in the sense of inspiration or poetic imagination (*Surprised by Joy*, Chapter I,

“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”

- “I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralyzed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or about the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. And reverence itself did harm.”

“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”

- “The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.”

“On Juvenile Tastes”

- “I was therefore writing ‘for children’ only in the sense that I excluded what I thought they would not like or understand; not in the sense of writing what I intended to be below adult attention. I may of course have been deceived, but the principle at least saves one from being patronizing. I never wrote down to anyone; and whether the opinion condemns or acquits my own work, it certainly is my opinion that a book worth reading only in childhood is not worth reading even then. The inhibitions which I hoped my stories would overcome in a child’s mind may exist in a grown-up’s mind too, and may perhaps be overcome by the same means.”